

# THE DEATH OF MAID McCREA

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O.C. AURINGER

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# THE DEATH OF MAID MCCREA

✓ BY  
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"The Road Builders," "Friendship's Crown  
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DEDICATION  
TO THE DAUGHTERS OF THE  
AMERICAN REVOLUTION  
THESE TWIN TRAGEDIES  
ARE DEDICATED BY  
THE AUTHOR

1909





## THE DEATH OF MAID McCREA



## THE DEATH OF MAID McCREA

(SAMUEL STANDISH, NARRATOR)

We left the camp behind us coiled in sleep,  
And moved with quiet footfalls to the plain.  
We paused a moment at the sentry's hail,  
And answering passed on. We left the road,  
The broad way from the fortress trailing  
north,  
And fell in file along a slender path  
That ribbanded the plain and river-marsh,  
O'erwaved a mount with shaggy growths  
bespread  
And crowned with pines and silence, spinning  
thence  
Still forth amid the wildwood's tangled  
glooms,  
On to a ruined blockhouse on the hill.  
There lay the ground we were to seize and  
keep  
From scout or foray of our lion foe  
Crouched in a thorny jungle in the north.

A score of men we were, armed woodman-like  
With musket, knife and hatchet,—every one  
A soul well seasoned in the storms of war—  
Sons of the sword, ambitious for the task—  
Led by a dark lieutenant, silent, stern,  
But oaken-souled and loved by every man,

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The trustiest in the camp. With scarce a  
    sound  
We moved in line along the narrow path,  
Dipped from the plain and pierced the river-  
    marsh,  
And steeped in moonshine and hot airs of  
    night,  
Set knees against the black acclivity,  
And gave ourselves to that wild wilderness.

We climbed the steep ascent with guns atrail,  
Picking our steps amid the roots and stones  
That lurked along the pathway. As we  
    moved,  
A trailing breach, with mischievous intent  
Would greet aloud some object on the way,  
Sending a sudden thrill along the file;  
And oft again some imp-inveigled foot  
Would slip and bring a soldier to his knee,  
Or send him reeling sidelong from the path,  
Mayhap to catch and cling by shrub or limb  
And sway his body back in line again,  
And onward as before. And presently  
A man would stop stock-still adown the file,  
Smote in the face by some lithe hazel rod  
That, bent unwillingly and springing back,  
Stung like a whip. Then would an oath  
    break forth—  
Strangled at birth; and followed in its turn  
A laugh or joke in cautious undertones  
At his expense who suffered from the blow—  
Danger just seasoned with a spice of fun,

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And no one made the worse, so all was still.  
For we were men trained not to utter sound  
Above necessity when foes were nigh  
Like those that girt us now.

Above the plain

Two mounts arose—steps of titanic stairs  
Leading to nothing, cancelling the wild  
And wondrous star-blown spaces of the  
North.

And on the foremost couched a narrow plot  
By jealous spirits stolen from the wilds,  
Gone bare of trees, but richly carpeted  
With soft green moss and silent. And it lay  
Kept three sides round with spears of hazel-  
wood

Enwoven in a wild vine's running skein.  
And dark beside its brink an aged pine  
Rose huge amid the blackness, and on high  
Parting, held forth a magic canopy,  
Mysterious o'er the moss-hushed forest floor.  
And down amid his roots a virgin spring  
Trembling and shy broke through the leaves  
and moss,

Hung wavering in the shadow for a space,  
Then fled in pearl and silver down the slope.

This was the ancient pine, and this the  
spring,  
And here the spot renowned in all the world.  
And here we halted breathing hard; and  
here,

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With studied charge and order from the  
chief—

A message out of darkness in the ear—

I took my place beside the aged pine  
To watch till morning; and my friends filed  
on,

Vague bulks in darkness streaming o'er the  
plot,

Along the dim and vanishing ascent,  
Forth to the ancient blockhouse on the hill.

A long and lonesome watch beside that tree—  
Long watch and lonesome; wide in darkness  
spread

The night-lone lanscape round and far  
away—

A wilderness gone dreaming, with the moon,  
Stars, silent-pacing clouds and stealthy airs

Alert above it. And beneath, alert,  
Their fellow guard and watchman of the  
night,

I with my weapon and a lonely heart,  
But willingly, kept uncomplaining hours,  
For manly honor's sake, and liberty.

The night hung slumberous, yet one must  
keep

His senses mustered round him—no clear  
task

With naught to keep him wakeful but to  
watch—

Just watch and wait the sluggish moments  
through

And listen. And to venture past the bounds,

The plot prescribed of safe and level ground,  
 To move about and feel oneself at large—  
 Forbidden grace! To make companionship  
 With one's own pleasant inner impulses  
 By singing songs as soldiers love to do,  
 Or whistling to call up the merry thoughts  
 To charm an idle watch—most perilous!  
 Our foes were wary ears on every side,  
 Fear figured armed warriors in the oaks,  
 And shaped fantastic foemen from the rocks,  
 And made the light leaves turning in their  
     dreams  
 Seem to the ear a gliding Indian's tread.

A soldier's mind hoards small philosophy  
 Among his treasures, woo it as he will;  
 A life of shocks breaks up the course of  
     thought  
 And checks it midway. Contemplation, shy,  
 Recluse and sensitive, starts from the sound  
 Of war's on-coming murmur militant,  
 And at roar of his impetuous rush  
 Gathers her things about her daintily  
 And vanishes;—guard! is the soldier's watch-  
     word!

And yet he has his fancies, often sweet,  
 Dreams dreams and has ambitions of his own,  
 Most welcome, though so oft they come to  
     naught.

He has his store of stirring memories  
 Laid up through years of strange vicissitude,  
 Of camps and marches, roaring battle fields,

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Shipwrecks at sea, disasters on the shore,  
Perils, escapes—all memorable things  
To lighten up the long hours of a watch.  
All these my mind tossed o'er, then fled away,  
Heart-piloted beyond the wilderness,  
And visited beside the Eastern sea  
A humble fisher-town 'twixt sands and crags  
Withdrawn apart—a butt for bluff sea winds,  
And salt-sharp storms flung inland from the  
main.

There stood a house I knew of, with its door  
Laid open to the tossed sea waves, with sand,  
And wreck and waste of many a stormy tide  
Thrown near it. And I saw upon the beach  
My three sweet motherless children hard at  
play

With all their little sea-things; fairy boats,  
Laden with fairy thoughts imaginative,  
Launched bravely from their hands with  
mingled cries

Of hope and apprehension;—"See, she  
floats!"

"She's down, she's gone!—Nay, there she  
comes again!"

"How sweetly she sails on now! We will call  
Her name The Lucky Sailor, for good luck!"  
And then they wave their hands and cry in the  
wind—

"Luck to the Lucky Sailor!" o'er the foam.

Back flashed my thought, and then forth out  
of earth,



Or visionary starlight, airy space,  
 Or fairyland of beauty, none knows where,  
 A phantom face rose softly on my sight  
 Glimpsed in an air ideal, like a star;  
 More rare for loveliness than eye beholds  
 Ever amid this solemn loneliness  
 Forsaken of fair things. And it appeared  
 Arrayed for wonder and magnificence  
 In one long living garment of bright hair,  
 Like that which waves 'mid webs of charmed  
     romance,

Magical tales and legends all forlorn  
 Imagined in old time, to net the heart,  
 And draw it happy captive through the tale.  
 And then my lips obedient spoke aloud  
 A name in the darkness, with such vehemence  
 As made me start alarmed, and throw around  
 Eyes apprehensive. But the loyal night,  
 Darkly discreet, gave not the sound away  
 To alien senseless ears. It was a name  
 Since famous in the annals of the land,  
 Which heard it cried round its circumference  
 Till it became a charm to conjure with,  
 A watchword and a symbol on men's tongues;  
 Even till a banner blazoned with that name,  
 And borne from town to town throughout the  
     land,

By close accord might gather to itself  
 How many a thousand gallant hearts and  
     swords

Pledged to the height of heavenly sacrifice  
 For love's fair sake, and country's liberty.

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And in that name what individual acts  
Have been accomplished! I have known the  
soul  
Lukewarm in hope and courage take quick  
fire,  
And burn to noble death beneath its spell.  
And I have known the base and dissolute,  
The wretch that fought for plunder, harden-  
ed men—  
Cold soldiers by profession, noisy spirits,  
Burlesques of heroes, lions in the camp  
And lambs in battle,—I have known all these  
To change their very nature at that name,  
And in the day of opportunity  
Prove heroes all, and terrible in fight,  
Heap fame and honor and proud victory  
Upon themselves and country!

But these things  
Were yet unknown, unborn; the burning deed  
Yet lingered that would consecrate that name,  
Baptize it in warm blood, and send it forth  
On its miraculous mission through the world.  
That name?—What name sings sweetest in  
our ears  
And lingers, save the name of Maid McCrea?

But by-and-by the morning! 'Twas the pipe  
Of bird, I think, that first announced the  
dawn  
From some near tree—a loud and buoyant  
strain,

Clear-resonant, as if the dear musician  
 Had captured some keen courier-note of dawn  
 And flung it forth in glory as bright news.  
 And at that sound pipe after pipe broke forth  
 Voluptuous from that hill of harmony,  
 Until a thousand rapturous throats were  
     strained  
 To hail the coming banners of the dawn.  
 And then came morning marching slowly,  
     slowly,  
 Up o'er the land.

                    Low down along the plain  
 Reposed the fortress ramparts coiled in dusk,  
 Beside whose hillocks rolled the Hudson's  
     stream  
 Pouring with all his thousands from the hills,  
 With rustle and murmur of his million feet.  
 He moved unseen beneath the ghostly  
     stream  
 Of flowing vapor shadowing his march  
 Far on into the southland like a dream.

But broader burned the red along the east,  
 And fainter waxed the veil that dimmed the  
     wood,  
 As swept the light to westward o'er the  
     world;  
 It touched the hills and they arose, unmasked,  
 And beamed afar with genial visages,  
 And in a moment o'er the wilderness

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Flushed the broad sun! a swimming fount  
of fire

That poured its streams across the solitudes  
Till glory kindled to their utmost bounds.  
His rays dissolved the mists along the  
stream,

And set the water sparkling; gilt the sands,  
Hung webs of golden gauze about the hills,  
And woke anew the music of the birds

In thicket deep and treetop everywhere—  
O 'twas a sight worth one long watch to see,  
That world-old battle of the day with night,  
Wherein the day is glorious conqueror.  
And I remember how I stood and drank  
My fill of that fresh fountain all alive,  
Till all my heart pronounced the thing divine!

A distant drum-pulse throbbing from the  
plain

And chiming with my heart-pulse pleasantly,  
O'erspilled the cup of rapture in my soul.

It ceased,—a curl fantastic of fierce smoke  
Gushed forth a sudden cloud upon the plain,  
And out the fort spoke through its early  
gun,

Telling the world of morning. And the  
sound,

Recoiling, passed and fell among the hills  
Crashing; as when a storm-cloud from the  
west

Discharges its first volley o'er the earth,  
Rending the ancient stillness of the woods.

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Making the heart leap up in beast and man,  
While all the trees a bashful silence keep  
In all their leaves. And then in mimicry  
A hundred echoes seizing on the theme  
Ran babbling it the greenwood arches  
through,  
Hither and thither flying through the wilds,  
With voices blowing ever faint and fainter,  
Far off and farther, dying on the airs  
That breathed from out the solitudes.

For me,  
Yet one long hour before relief would come.  
I leaned upon my weapon and looked down  
Upon the narrow vista of the plain,  
Where war had drawn some furrows of light  
soil  
And planted them with cannon. There had  
men  
Built for themselves rude homes in which to  
dwell  
And till their narrow slips of yellow earth,  
And hunt and fish and barter, nested there  
Beneath the fostering pinions of the fort,—  
Each cottage with its tributary lawn,  
Beds of rare roses, yellow marigolds,  
And lilacs shadowing doorways with their  
green,  
Their blooms now fallen; still where friendly  
birds  
All summer sang and nested 'mid their  
boughs.

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And there were people moving in my sight  
About their morning tasks—a pleasant thing,  
As I remember how it moved me then,—  
Some gleaning wood to start their early fires,  
And some with yoke and bucket and long  
toil

Who brought fresh water from the river's  
brink,

Or drove their cattle forth amid the dew  
To some deep forest pasture out of sight.

And over and beyond, a pigmy crew,  
Ridiculous in distance as they moved

On errands lost to all but conscious eyes,  
My camp-mates and companions in the war,

A few from off their banquet-board of sand  
Quaffing their early dram of heavenly air;

Half-naked gunners on the parapets,

Toiling away like demons in the fire

Of the red sun; and creeping on his post

The drowsy sentinel—gun and bayonet

Molten to fire and splendor as he turned;

Or servants from the stables leading forth

With halters slack the train of thirsty beasts

To water, where the river lapped the sand.

And I remember, too, most humanly,

How good the cookhouse smoke seemed to  
my eyes,

And how the thoughts of breakfast cheered  
me up,

And all the genial messroom company

One has in barracks.

But beholding these  
 I saw not all the vision of the time;  
 And truly such a wealthy-hearted morning  
 Was pledge enough of fairer things to come  
 Than homely-woven scenes with villagers  
 Slow shuttling through; or stuff of fireier  
     grain  
 Embossed with pictures of armed battle-  
     ments  
 And warlike figures;—something for a crown  
 Of this fair morning kingdom in the land.  
 O happy eyes to see that pledge fulfilled!  
 O prosperous time! For on the glimmering  
     hem  
 Of the gay forest robe that clothed the camp,  
 A something, charmed with airy grace and  
     motion,  
 Something akin to sunrise and fresh dews  
 And winds and blowing roses of the wilds—  
 A gleam of morning—crossed my longing  
     sight  
 Borne lightly onward. It was where the  
     waves,  
 Penned in a cove that balked their onward  
     rush,  
 Like sheep pressed in confusion and complain-  
     ed,  
 Striking the sand and shrinking in recoil,  
 Pressing back on their fellows timidly,  
 As if they feared to tread the shining sands  
 That knew their footprints through unnum-  
     bered years.

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I saw it break the shadow of the wood,  
And dawn another sunrise on the camp,  
Just touching it in passing. Where the fort  
Thrust out a threatening angle toward the  
stream,

Its fairy-woven footsteps met the path—  
The way our feet had taken—wafted on  
Across the meadows, like a morning cloud  
Dewing the earth behind it as it goes.  
I watched it hushed, as one so often will,  
Who stands and cranes his neck and holds his  
breath

To note the outcome of some ventured guess  
As if 'twere life or death. And so my heart  
Held wager with my eyes who this might be  
Coming so lightly. 'Twas a woman's shape  
Coming so sweetly!—sight in soldier's eyes  
Most prized of all in this great wilderness  
Because so rare and transient.

“It is

she!”

Some influence runs before and cries rejoicing,—

Some courier of the heart—“Yes, it is she!”  
And the eye answers—“Nay, it is not she!  
The gay apparel, the unstately pace,  
The unseemly season—'tis some other she!”  
But meanwhile like that cloud she floated on,  
And came unto a cabin reared of logs  
Piled roughly in their bark, and covered o'er  
With faded forest branches. Low it stood



Amid the outmost circle of rude homes,  
 A humble little dwelling, with its door  
 Swung open to the morning, and a curl  
 Of friendly smoke above its chimney stack.  
 And to the door the maid of morning came  
 And knocked. And from the dwelling came  
                   a dame

Of fair and liberal port, and courteously  
 Took by the hand the early visitant  
 And led her in—a robber of my right!  
 They passed away from sight, but ere they  
                   went,

A curl of laughter floated up to me  
 Upon the air of morning sweetly borne.  
 And then my heart laid claim upon my eyes  
 For one more wager won! And it was true,  
 Even as my heart had said! And this was she,  
 The famous, lovely, luckless Maid McCrea,  
 Whose face had set such martial hearts  
                   aflake,

Whose mournful fate has set the world on  
                   fire!

And I was glad at heart to have her near,  
 And thanked the sunny morning in my soul,  
 Blessed the soft airs, the odors of the wood,  
 Rejoiced in all the summer-nested scene  
 With forms of fellow men, so much her pres-  
                   ence

Gladdened the glittering world. . . .

But

                                  suddenly  
 All pleasure died within me as my soul,

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By some mysterious instinct like a hound,  
Caught a fleet scent of evil in the air,  
Far off or hovering. Ah, what airy dream,  
What sweet unwisdom had enticed her forth  
Arrayed as for her bridal, with the sun,  
To seek an enemy's lodge? I knew the dame,  
A brave kind lady, but in sentiment  
A Royalist outspoken from the soul;—  
Our boasted gem strayed to this treasury  
Of treason, with her lover hovering nigh  
In ardent circles from the English camp,  
Perchance prepared to speed with sudden  
wing

To pluck it thence and wear it on his heart  
Before her friends and mine—the feeble few  
Who held the fort—for 'twas a conquered  
land!

What spirit had lured her forth at such a time  
Of watch and danger? Was it possible  
She dreamed to quit the shelter of the camp,  
And home and friends and all the gallant  
guard

Of hearts and weapons leagued in her defence,  
For that dark tract of wilderness, beset  
By such too-well-known perils—all for a sight  
Of one mad boy in uniform! Alas,  
If she had only known! Had only known!  
Had but her feet kept their old paths that  
day!

A wild sound broke upon me, like a peal  
Of cannon to a soldier in his dreams

Calling him up to battle, ere the light.  
 A sullen crash of rifles overhead  
 Tore up the air around me, as a gale  
 Rips a strained tent; then rose a cry so wild,  
 So savage that my heart stopped at the sound  
 An instant in its wonted harmony,  
 Then leapt with one wild impulse, and a  
     shock  
 That rocked the brain in its strong citadel.  
 Ah, well I understood that fatal cry—  
 The horrible cry all mad and animal,  
 The wild dishevelled courier of surprise  
 And all the rush and tumult of the pack!  
 Out from the bosom of a gaunt ravine  
 It rose, that cleft the hilltop with a gash  
 Of some old torrent-stroke of ages gone,  
 Now rolling down a flood of fiery hate  
 Upon my hapless comrades of the watch!  
 Downward the cloud of battle swept the hill,  
 Shooting its muffled lightnings as it went,  
 With thunder and sound of voices hoarsely  
     blent—  
 Loud shouts and short sharp cries from here  
     and there  
 Where struck a shot the life, and laid on  
     earth  
 A soldier quivering. And on its edge,  
 Now and again, lithe figures sprang to sight—  
 And vanished where the hazels swathed the  
     boles  
 Of mighty trees; or caught in surging smoke,  
 Paled struggling in that limbo like a dream.

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And oft there passed the fleeting pantomime  
Of clenched and struggling shapes that rolled  
on earth,  
With nimble limbs like serpents writhed and  
tossed,  
Knit in the last great grapple breast to breast.

The first live soul to issue from that cloud  
Was a poor soldier flying from aloft,  
Wild-eyed, bareheaded, wounded, weapon-  
less,

A meteor of blood and suffering.  
He fell, and gathering, rose and wavered on,  
Now stumbling more than running toward  
the spot

Where I stood fixed and straining. And he  
saw—

He saw, and raised a feeble cry of cheer,  
But then a stream of flame broke from above  
And downward, and he stopped with staring  
eyes.

An instant ere he sank in death before me,  
Pierced through his breast. Then rose his  
crouching foe

And flamed at him like sanguine Lucifer,  
With cries of triumph, bearing high his blade  
To rend away the trophy of his deed.

Then with its old impulsive eloquence  
My weapon rose and spoke! and at the word  
Down rolled the heathen howling—clutching  
earth,

And showering leaves in awful agony—

Ah! how the bright blood rainbowed from  
his breast:—

A stroke well struck—alas, the only one  
That fate permitted me to deal that day!  
For see! The hanging cliff was all alive  
With gliding forms and fearful visages  
And streaming head-plumes! Then my soul  
affirmed

The fated issue of that dark surprise  
And fight so quickly finished;—naught alas,  
Save luckless death or capture to my friends,  
Whose weapons spoke no more, whose shouts  
were still,

Whose enemies in wanton victory  
Ranged everywhere! One instant desperate  
Remained wherein to fly before the storm,  
Or else to stay and die amidst the storm—  
Such was the choice. With madness in my  
soul

Yet loving life, I thrust my weapon by,  
That fate to many a foeman, and my friend  
Approved and true;—gift of my ancestor  
Whose deeds in former wars had made it  
famous,

Famed fighter, famous weapon!—cast aside  
My ox-horn flask, and leathern pouch with  
balls,

Plucked out the heavy war-axe from its rest  
And lingeringly released it from my hand,  
Till all disarmed save for one slender blade  
Clasped firm I stood; then glancing warily

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An instant, prying forth for shadowing  
forms,  
And naught discerning, slipped I down the  
path,  
Brushing the foliage lightly; then leapt out,  
Long, like a hunted buck when stretch the  
hounds  
Red-mouthed upon his track; and speeding  
raised  
My voice and rang aloud along the plain—  
“Fly for your lives! The foe is at your  
doors!  
Fly to the fort!” to warn the villagers.  
I never reached the fort, though,—luck, or  
fate,  
Or some ill influence that dogs mens’ steps,  
Had writ me down unfortunate that day!  
For scarce my feet found me amid the plain,  
Running with every nerve stretched, arms  
a-play,  
My spirits up and dancing, courage high,  
And passion all enlisted for the heat,—  
When there! a hazel thicket by the course  
Let out three lurking heathen on my front,  
And snapped the glorious race short! One  
that hopped  
Out of his covert like an evil toad—  
A hunched black creature with malignant  
eye—  
Up-swung a firearm and the flame sprang  
out;  
And I sank down upon my wounded limb

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Stung by the hissing missile, for a moment  
Surprised and shocked, not knowing well my  
hurt.

As boys a sapling under some fierce gust,  
Doubled to earth—to spring again and  
stand,

I fell to rise again; and met my foes  
With one slim blade, hot-hearted for the  
strife

Of skill and warrior courage to the end.

But ere a blow was struck, amid the pause  
Defiant, filled with flying hateful glances,

A tall wild warrior limbed like Hercules,  
With boyish gesture flung his weapon down,  
And lightly leaping, coiled himself about  
me,

Tying my limbs in tangles of lithe strength,  
And bowed me down to earth. As a har-  
vester

Grapples a sheaf of maize within his arms,  
And struggling, binds its summit with a band  
Of twisted straw, then bowing swings it clear  
And lays it with its fellows on the earth,  
So on the earth, unfellowed, laid he me.

There his grim mate with foul and greedy  
hands

Bound fast my limbs with cords, that 'twixt  
his teeth

Hung loosely dangling, waiting such an end.  
Then both arose and looked upon me there  
In mocking triumph. Then the hunchback  
plucked

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My dagger from the grass, and whetted it  
Upon his earth-soiled moccasin awhile,  
Eyeing me as a butcher eyes a sheep  
Laid bound for slaughter. Ceasing, up he  
sprang,  
And flashed the steel in my eyes, extravagant  
In cries and shows of triumph.

So

I lay  
Bound in the presence of my enemies.

It was a thing most wonderfully done!  
I never saw aught like it in the world,  
Amid the arts and cunning slights of force  
Long practiced in the handicraft of war.  
My heart cried shame upon me then, and  
tears,  
The first to dim my eyes for many a day,  
Flowed to reproach my fallen estate—that I,  
A famous wrestler in my college days,  
A man of action, and on many fields  
Since then triumphant in my power of limb,  
Should yield at last my prestige in the art  
To that wild fellow of the woods, untaught,  
With naught but simple nature for his friend.  
And yet amid my sore humility  
I did admire the deed! It pleased me so  
That I forgave the fellow on the spot  
With all my heart, it was so bravely done!  
A few swift words in their ungente tongue,  
Complete with glancing eyes and waving  
arms,



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Passed 'twixt my captors. Then the giant  
took

His weapons, beckoned to his chosen mate,  
A wild and sinewy creature like a wolf,  
Who followed; and the pair with secret steps  
Passed silently from sight. And then ap-  
proached

Once more that bunch of deep deformity,  
And cut away my feet-bands with a stroke,  
And wide they flew recoiling at the touch;  
And with the hateful menace of a spear  
And horrid-mingled speech, he bade me rise,  
Pointing with crooked finger up the slope.  
And I arose and like a tortoise passed  
Before him up the track and o'er the way  
My feet erewhile had spurned like a proud  
stag,

Printing the outrolled tablet of the path  
With characters of blood; and all the while  
My brain a fire, my spirit brewing gall  
I labored on; and soon with limbs rebound  
Lay, scarce a man, beneath the ancient pine  
Where gushed the spring of crystal from the  
bank—

A vein of pearl by moonshine, but in the sun  
A darting snake of gold that rustling ran  
Down briary cleft of hillslope to the plain.  
I lay and watched it from my rugged couch  
Awhile, half-pleased and soothed to see it  
flow,

Bearing my heart a moment on its wave.

## 32 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

Soon sounds were heard above me on the  
rock,  
Voices confused, and shuffle of moving feet,  
And ring of arm that clanged on fellow arm  
Flung rudely down. But all I heard un-  
moved,  
Being downcast and captive. But my guard  
Grew restless at the signs, and flew aside  
Often to view the scene, as oft returning  
With looks more dark and vicious; till at last,  
O'ercome by restless longing like a child,  
Fretful at aught that bars him from his wish,  
He vanished up the crag, leaving behind  
His spear and one wild warning glance of  
eye  
Shot backward as he passed. I gave no look,  
But lay until his last limb disappeared  
Withdrawn across the brink. 'Twas then  
with pain  
And utmost struggle that I rose and stood,  
Supported by the pine tree's friendly  
strength—  
How burned the cords like fire into my  
flesh—  
And looked at level range across the plot  
Brought even with my gaze—It was a sight  
To stir the soul with wrath, disgust and  
hate—  
To fill the heart with curses, not with prayers,  
The mouth with prayers that were naught  
else but curses;  
To wake a drowsing demon in the breast

## DEATH OF MAID McCREA 33

To thrills of fiendishness that puts to shame  
The thing divine in man. A company  
Foul-handed with the blood of gallant souls  
Were there and flourishing around a heap  
Of battle-trophies, which their greedy hands  
Had stripped from slaughtered bodies of  
brave men

And they my comrades! Garments soaked  
in blood

Were there, and many a weapon with its steel  
Dimmed by the dust of battle, as it fell  
From some strong soldier's grasp, struck in  
mid-heat

Of fiery onset. One slim blade I saw  
Snapped at the point and crimsoned to the  
hilt!

And in the throng were some that crawled  
about

On wounded limbs, the furnace of their hate  
Seven times more heated by the fires of pain.  
And oft some frenzied spirit in the band  
Would pluck a loathly object from his girdle,  
And shake the fearful trophy in the air,  
Whereon responsive cries broke from the  
throng,

Filling my spirit with loathing. Back I sank  
Upon the kindlier earth, all sick at heart,  
And all my soul offended at the sight.  
The ring of coming footsteps now were  
heard

### 34 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

Climbing the path behind me, though the  
leaves

Hung thick before the way, and mixed o'er-  
head,

Shut out the panting climbers from my sight.

A hope my soul had harbored while I lay

Helpless, with prayers for vengeance on our  
foes,

Sprang forth alive at these oncoming sounds,

And broke the dear news to my panting  
heart—

This was the looked-for succor from the  
camp—

Alas, that never came! The foliage

That draped with green the shining vestibule

Of that resplendent temple so defiled,

Was shaken for a space as by a breeze,

Then parted, and my conqueror appeared

With some behind him. It was then I saw

The first true act of savage gallantry

My eyes had ever seen. A step aside

He made and paused, and gracefully with  
his hand

Drew back the plaited foliage from the path,

And let two ladies through. The first that  
came

Was Jennie, issuing from the tender shade

In all her maiden glory;—like the sun

O'ermounting in his course victorious

Through heaven the cloud that barred his  
early beams.

The morning exercise had spread a flush

Of rosy warmth upon her fairest face;  
 Her bonnet now was off, and from her  
     head—

That strong proud head she carried like a  
     queen—

Even from her low brow backward o'er her  
     crown

And down her back until its crinkled gold  
 Straying, trailed up the pathway as she came,  
 Rolled down in glorious billows that great  
     hair.

I looked upon her face—there was no shade  
 Of fear that marred the glory of its charm,  
 But in her lovely eyes, and on her cheeks

A fire of splendid indignation burned;  
 And on her lips, proud-curved and beautiful,  
 Abode a soul of scorn unspeakable,

The judgment of a proud imperial heart  
 Offended. . . . Painfully behind her came

Her friend and hostess, wearily ascending,  
 Above whose shoulder as she came two eyes  
 Shone ominous of a captor at her back.

Young eyes see all;—and so the maiden's  
     glance

Sweeping the space soon found me where I lay  
 Bound and unmanned against the tree's wide  
     trunk;

And swift of step, defiant of restraint,  
 She came and looked and knew, then kindly  
     smiled,

And spoke with maiden diffidence and said—

## 36 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

“May I speak for a moment?—we are cap-  
tives  
And need to cheer each other. How those  
bonds  
Must hurt you, drawn with such inhuman  
rigor;  
Had I a knife, I’d cut them in the face  
Of yonder savages, and let you go.—  
You might flee down the hillside and escape.”  
“Not while you staid a captive, gentle maid,”  
The soldier in me answered; and her eyes  
Sparkled at that, while warmer glowed her  
cheek.  
And then she bent above me till some locks  
Of her great hair fell forward o’er her breast  
And touched my own with blessing; then  
spoke low  
“Fear not for us at all, we shall not suffer!  
These creatures dare not harm us if they  
would;  
Their master is the English Commandant,  
Cousin and friend of my kinswoman here;—  
They take us to the English camp:—farewell;  
When safely there we shall remember you.”  
O tender light of woman’s sympathy  
Shining in that dark place!

A

moment more

And all were passing onward up the path  
Around the rock’s blunt angle to the plot,—  
A rugged path for tender feet to tread,

Rough, hard, and stony cruel!—O I wished—  
I wished and longed, but could not, being  
bound,

To ease them on—it was but natural,  
One loves to smoothe the pathway for a friend!

And as they vanished, winding round the  
rock,

I felt that awful sinking of the soul  
Once more surprise me, that I oft had felt,  
Sometimes on battle fields, sometimes in camp,  
And often on the water of the deep,  
Forerunning some disaster, woe or death  
To one I loved the best in all the world.  
'Tis strange how often we are made to bear  
In terror in the secret of our souls  
Life's dark calamities ere they befall.

They gained the plot and halted. Then a  
shout

Vociferous from savage throats arose  
In greeting to their chief. And then the chiefs,  
Grave and subdued, apart upon the rock,  
Assembled in dark conclave,—motionless  
Except for lips and eyes unresting moved  
In energy of speech, or glances shot  
Oft toward the fort with looks significant,  
And oft upon the captives. And among them,  
First in authority and eloquence,  
Presided my wild captor—Wyondotte,  
Surnamed The Panther, terror of whose deeds  
With torch and tomahawk had filled the land

## 38 DEATH OF MAID MCCREA

With a brood of shuddering rumors. . . .

Brief the council

And soon dissolved: and mixing with the men  
By mingled speech and sign, the chiefs made  
known

Their purpose. Then stood forth two men of  
brawn.

But mild, and innocent of battle stain  
Or show of human trophy, and addressed  
In broken speech but still unbroken signs,  
And not ungentle art and emphasis.

The elder captive, pointing toward the north  
With often outstretched arm and liberal air  
Of signified assurance. But the dame  
Returned no word nor moved, but stood bow-  
ed down

As if absorbed in her calamity.

And oft she sighed and deep, like one o'er-  
spent

With toil or utmost grief. A little while  
She so remained, and then she raised her  
head.

With stern and flashing eyes set on her foes,  
And opening at once her heart and lips.

Poured out with marvelous mastery of tongue  
A shower of indignation on the band.

Till every one shrank awestruck from that  
speech

Whose fire and thrust wrought havoc with  
their wits.

And overthrew each warrior where he stood



With wondering admiration. Cowed, subdued.

By such unwonted thunder in their ears.

They changed as it went on their art and craft

To win obedience to their design

From this reluctant captive.—cringed and crawled

In awkward forms of savage blandishment.

And flatteries unpracticed by their kind.

"O you are gallant warriors, every one!

How nobly you have triumphed over us

Weak women! In the house where you surprised us

Remain a black slave and a babe concealed.

Draw out your bravest warriors and send forth

And bring them, and complete your victory!

You cowardly base creatures! who from ambush

Of tree or rock shoot unsuspecting men

You fear to meet in battle! Had we arms

Other than nature gave us—gun or sword—

We two, and women, here upon this rock

Would turn upon you, cowards that you are.

And beat you back among the bears and wolves

Who drove you out to war on weaker flesh!

You say you will not slay us!—we believe you.

40 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

Women cannot resist you, wherefore slay  
them?

Better to sell them in your master's camp  
For gold with which the deeper to debase  
Your lives, already baser than the dregs  
And scum of living nature!—no, not sell,  
But yield for ransom—that's a better phrase,  
But that is white, a turn of English speech  
Coined by your masters. Call it something  
else!

Has your rich tongue no term for such a  
deed? . . .

Go with you? No! You cannot budge me  
hence

One step against my will; and carry me

Ye cannot. Nature has provided me

A frame ye cannot stir! . . . And you  
would part

This dear child from me, lest we being to-  
gether

Should comfort one another! I have heard  
Of beings so inhuman, but till now

I never looked on such . . . I cannot  
hope

To vie in talk with you, and speak out all

My heart about you. Nature has withheld

From me the gift of speech,—I am content

Since she has favored you therewith! Talk on,

And let your virtues blossom in your speech

That wither in your acts! . . . And if  
I go

Pray whither will you lead me? But why  
ask!

Do I not know already? Where is gold  
 But in the English camp wherewith to buy  
 Unfortunate captives?—you would take me  
           thither.

Beelzebub was aye a blunderer,  
 And you do honor to your ancestor  
 By keeping his tradition! Take me then  
 Forthwith at his command! My ancestor  
 He had a kinsman who was ancestor  
 Of a certain English soldier, commandant  
 Now of his Majesty's battallions camped  
 But one league hence. And I his kinswoman,  
 And loyal subject of his liege, the king  
 Of England and these glorious provinces,  
 Consent to be led to him, bound and shamed,  
 A miserable captive! Your reward  
 Will doubtless much surprise you when it  
           comes!—

You do not understand? Oh, well, I said  
 Lead on, but slowly as you can. Much gold  
 Shall pay you for my safe delivery. . . .  
 Farewell sweet Jenny; it is hard to part  
 Thus torn by force asunder; but be brave,  
 We'll meet for better luck in yonder camp!"

Thus their persuasions triumphed, and the  
           pair  
 Assumed her escort, moving leisurely,  
 And sought the broader highway pointing  
           east,  
 Along the steep hill's foot; and so were gone.  
 And as they passed, my eyes from the pursuit

42 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

Flew back to the rock where hovered all my  
fears  
Like birds among the branches, when the  
snake  
Comes crawling toward the nest. Upon that  
rock  
Conspicuous amid the wilderness,  
With those wild scenes and faces witnessing,  
These children of two races, white and red,  
The maiden and the warrior, with a sword  
Extinguishing between them, stood apart  
And gazed upon each other. . . . May  
his race  
Melt from the white man's march as sank his  
gaze  
Before those eyes of steadfast innocence  
Judging his lawless soul.

Meanwhile

the sun  
All bright till then and shining in his strength,  
Making a world of magic with his beams,  
Suddenly darkened; and a wind arose,  
Unheard before, and wailing filled the wood  
With mournful tones, and sinking swept the  
ground,  
Shaking the leaves and trailers on the stones,  
And whispering round the tree-trunks drearily  
As if it knew and grieved. Amid the trees  
The merry birds ceased suddenly their songs  
And fled with cries into the darkened air,  
Borne far in startled beves out of sight.

Away in forest depths some wandering wolf  
Howled twice and ceased; and some distress-  
éd beast

Within a far-off farmyard raised its voice  
And lowed disconsolate to the darkened  
sky.

And through my life and blood a dull chill  
crept;

And o'er my soul a deep foreboding cloud  
Closed by degrees, and was not lifted more  
Till that dark evil drawing to a head  
Discharged itself in blood upon the land.

There rose an instant tumult on the rock,  
Like shouts of drunken soldiers when a town  
Is sacked, and riot roars amid the streets,  
Urged on by lust of plunder and vile  
drink

Concocted for man's evil. And I saw  
The storm of lawless passion break and rage,  
'Mid brutal violence, and strife of tongues  
Not wanting coarsest poison; eddying gusts  
Distinct with writhing forms and tossing  
arms;

And round the circle playing here and there  
The sullen lightning from hate-heated eyes.  
And stayed against my faithful tree I stood,  
While all the man within me cried aloud  
In urgent protestation 'gainst my bonds  
No power of mine could rend,—although I  
strove

With strength by passion trebled. All in vain;

## 44 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

The cord was trusty, and the knot stood sure  
Against all might. Ah, had my eyes been  
swords,

My heart, my soul, my impulse deadly spears,  
What tide of slaughter then had swept the  
plot,

What vengeance washed it clean of every  
foe!

And meantime is the midst the maiden stood,  
Like some large-molded statue aureoled

That lifted up in fair tranquility,  
Blanched a degree, but steadfast, contem-  
plates

The passionate gusts that flourish round its  
base.—

A moment!—Then upon the storm's black  
rim

A weapon slowly rose with level gleam,  
Hung there an instant set and ominous  
Ere the wild shot screamed out. A leaping  
flame,

A gush of livid smoke, and I beheld  
The maid start suddenly, as if surprised  
At the hurt done her; saw her shining head  
Drop with its crown of glory on her breast;  
I heard a long deep sigh as of a soul  
Passing to quiet rest; and sinking down  
She lay a lovely ruin on the earth,

All overflowed with her great wave of hair.  
And then I saw a hatchet whirl in air  
And fall upon that poor defenseless head  
Scarce yet insensible,—yea and I saw

A savage hand twined in those sacred locks,  
 A hell-lit face above, a glitter of steel,  
 And then—and then I saw no more! I barred  
 With burning lids my eyes against the sight,  
 And turned and laid me on the earth and  
                   wept,—

As I weep now! Forgive me if I weep;  
 It helps the heart to grieve a little while;  
 The sluice of tears drains off the flood of woe,  
 And saves the heart from too much mem-  
                   ory,—

The memory of that deed unparalleled  
 In all the annals of this bloody land  
 Since history began!

O there goes forth

A cry that shall be quiet never more,  
 A voice to speak unto the years unborn—  
 A voice proclaiming judgment, and a power  
 To trouble thrones, cast reputations down,  
 Beyond wide seas, in other alien lands  
 Our arms can never reach, our laws remold,  
 Our justice rectify. That voice was heard  
 A war-cry thrilling through the patriot souls  
 On Saratoga's field; and flying on  
 It sounded wild o'er Yorktown, and gave  
                   back

The eagle to our hosts. On ocean's plain  
 It sounded solemnly amid the roar  
 Combined of wind and wave and bellowing  
                   guns,  
 Filled with heroic madness the strong souls

## 46 DEATH OF MAID McCREA

Of seamen, till another answering cry,  
Again of victory, ran on the waves,  
Bearing the news to every land o'er sea  
That Freedom stooping from her spendid  
          heights  
Had lifted up our country to her realm.



# THE LOVER'S TRAGEDY



## THE LOVER'S TRAGEDY

The lamp is out long since upon that play;  
The actors have departed one by one  
Home through the darkness. I alone remain,  
A straying shape upon the fading edge  
Of that receding drama. Out of time  
And out of place amid the alien clash  
Of newer interests, I stay awhile,—  
A foreigner amid the now and new,—  
Until the tale is told I only know,  
Who only live to tell it—then I go.

You who were pleased to listen for awhile  
To my wild story of the gentle girl  
Dead in the dimness of the lonesome woods,  
Listen—more briefly—to its kindred tale  
And climax, named the Lover's Tragedy.

Remember, when again with sorrowing eyes  
I looked on things around me from my place,  
All that mysterious darkness had withdrawn.  
Again the sun burned full and warm in  
    heaven,  
Once more the birds sang in a thousand trees;  
The squirrel skipped and sported on his limb,  
And cast the empty refuse of his feast  
With clattering jibes upon me where I lay,  
Then sped with nimble scampering out of  
    sight,

Amused at his own wit and my disgrace.  
 A tuning breeze hummed quaintly in my ears  
 Making the leaves shake lightly, while the sun  
 Speckled the rich turf under them with  
                   gold.—

Nature, who closed her eyes on that dark  
                   deed,  
 Refusing to behold it, now was gay,  
 And made her Sabbath music as before.

Ah me! I scarcely knew what next they did,  
 Save that they spared me;— spared my  
                   broken life,  
 While they had rent my heart and stunned  
                   my brain,  
 And stabbed my suffering spirit through and  
                   through  
 With twice the pains of death. They loosed  
                   my bonds,  
 And bade me rise—not spitefully indeed,  
 Even a little pitifully it seemed—  
 And I arose and made attempt to walk  
 With such poor progress as on limbs be-  
                   numbed

A man might make along so rough a way.  
 And I was stunned in head and intellect,  
 And moved as one who walks amid a sleep,  
 Scarce feeling pain or pleasure. Everything  
 Seemed strangely dim and dusky round me  
                   now,  
 And faint and dream-like. All the pleasant  
                   sounds

And gladsome sights that charmed the summer wood  
 Came to me through some baffling medium  
 That cloaked the senses.

So we passed  
 along,

My captors strangely temperate with me  
 In my loose pace and stumblings to and fro  
 With feet benumbed and heedless. Yet they  
 kept  
 Ever beside me, gliding dim and dark  
 Like demons in a nightmare—creeping,  
 creeping,  
 So dumb and constant; it was terrible—  
 Truly they seemed like devils!

Slow we went

Under the cooling shade, o'er leaf-floors  
 spread  
 To deaden more our footfalls; till ere long  
 Around a thrust of tangled torrent-bed  
 We broke upon the dame and her tall guards,  
 Trav'lers more slow than we upon the road  
 That ran we knew not whither. Yet was she  
 Still bright of eye and strenuous of soul,  
 And trod complainingless upon her way.  
 I thought she paled a little when she saw  
 Our band with but one prisoner in the midst,  
 And that the one least present in her  
 thoughts,—  
 Perhaps she questioned me by some mute  
 sign,

But I was stunned and dreaming, knowing  
     naught,  
 And she bore bravely onward as before.

At length we reached a cabin hid in woods,  
 Log-built and brown, with hospitable look,  
 A forest inn with loungers round the place,—  
 White men and red who wakened as we  
     came,  
 And gathered close and gazed, but nothing  
     said,—  
 And dogs and children playing round the  
     porch.

And here we stayed and rested from our toil,  
 Took food, and such rough comfort as we  
     might

Being downcast and captive and reserved  
 For what more ill we knew not;—yes, and  
     I—

At least I cared not! Earth had now for  
     me

No fate I cared to question or to know,  
 So weary was my life of all things here  
 In this the sickness of a soul o'erwrought.  
 'Mid comings and 'mid goings all that day  
 Of horse and foot—the kinds that use the  
     paths

Through wilds of scarce-delivered solitudes  
 In new unordered lands, we staid at rest,  
 And unmolested, save they suffered not  
 The grace of speech between us. And all  
     night,

Through supernatural hush within, without,  
 We slept, and woke and sorrowed, slept  
     again,  
 And woke at last into another day.

Soon as the morn was perfect came our guards  
 Around us, while we ate our early meal;  
 And when 'twas done they led us forth again  
 In silence to the highway, where we turned  
 Once more our faces toward the haunted tract  
 Where sunk in woods lay deep our unknown  
     goal.

And now our captors grew more frank and  
     kind,  
 Somewhat more human and articulate,  
 And not ungently strove to cheer us up,  
 Speaking in words and signs of camps and  
     friends,  
 Of ransoms and of coming liberty,—  
 Themes, as they thought, to buoy a captive  
     up,  
 And light an eye-gleam in the senseless skull  
 Of rank misfortune;—unto me all vain,  
 Too heart-sick to rejoice at anything;  
 Too worn with all this seeming senseless  
     strife,  
 Of all this noisy war of arms and tongues,  
 These endless themes of battles, battles,  
     battles,  
 Of marches, sallies, camps and victories

Forever on men's tongues!—sick of the  
land—

Sick of the land and all its miseries,  
And even of life and all that life disclosed!  
And my companion in captivity,  
She was too angry still to heed them much,  
Or answer if she heeded.

When the sun  
Burned through the loftier tree-tops on the  
right

And glanced upon the path with bashful rays,  
And well nigh half the summer day was done,  
We broke the pact of that green lonely world,  
And saw the land sink suddenly, engulfed  
Amid a tract of cedar-shadowed soil—  
The scarce-healed wound of some old torrent-  
stroke

In some far time when all the world was new.

And there beneath us lay the English camp,  
Dotting a low knoll with its clustered tents  
Like cones of fleece amid the blackened wreck,  
And brown earth scorched by fire. Around  
were walls

Of cedar-shade impenetrably wild  
And dim and lonesome. 'Twas a pretty sight,  
Touching the soul with a reviving sense  
Of cheerful life and human fellowship  
Succeeding that dim march with souls bowed  
down

Under the pressure of captivity.  
And as I looked it seemed as if I saw,



Instead of tents that sheltered mortal foes,  
 A camp of angels with celestial tents  
 Pitched in the heart of the great wilderness,  
 Gleaming a moment, soon to be withdrawn.

Our captors shouting, then discharged in air  
 Their ready weapons; for their march was  
     done,  
 Their danger past, their triumph nigh complete.

And from the camp's rear rose an answering  
     cry,

And there came streaming forth a troop of  
     friends—

Friends of our foes—God help us, not of  
     ours!—

With cries and leapings, like a pack of dogs  
 Flying with yelps and gambolings of joy  
 To meet their kind returning from a raid  
 Upon some innocent sheep-fold, bathed in  
     blood

And mad with gust of slaughter—so they  
     came.

A file of soldiers too were soon on foot,  
 Flashing in steel and scarlet up the path;  
 And as they came the clamorous dogs grew  
     mute,

Ceased their vile gambolings and slunk away  
 O'erawed and cowed. And those whose game  
     we were

Submitted while the King's men filing round  
 Enclosed and drew us from them. Silently

With pompous tramp they drew us down the  
slope,

And round amid the white tents on our way,  
To where a log-reared cabin capped with  
bark

Appeared, the center of the clustered tents  
Flecking the knoll. A sentinel in the path  
Stood by at mute attention as we passed,  
And eyed us with unmoving countenance.

Behind us trailed a line of shadowy forms,  
Suffered to pass with that mute tolerance  
That shadows claim which dog us every-  
where;—

Nay, worse,—scorned and detested, so it  
seemed,

With silent and significant neglect,  
By these their bounden patrons, paymasters,  
And nominal fair friends.

Ere long

we stood

About the door of the great general's lodge  
Commanding these strong legions—men and  
arms,

Marching with purple pride and waving flags  
To crush the weak and nigh dejected few  
Who bore the burden of this mighty cause—  
The freedom of the people—on their swords.  
The red guard parted right and left, and we  
Passed in between them through the open  
door,

My captive friend and I; and following still,

Our captors, mute but watchful. Then the  
     guard  
 Formed and wheeled off, a sergeant proud  
     and tall  
 Stepping with solemn dignity behind.

A low rude room it was wherein we stood,  
 Divided in the midst by lagging folds  
 Of royal curtains looped along their staff  
 Like banners o'er an archway. All the walls  
 Were cedarn beams yet shaggy with the bark  
 Wherein they grew; and for a floor our feet  
 Stood ankle-deep in bearskins loosely laid  
 To hide the bare and black earth underneath.  
 Around the place were banners, weapons,  
     chests  
 Carved, and with mighty clasps of brass  
     thereon,  
 Ancient, from over seas. There stood a desk  
 Whereat a pale clerk in half-uniform  
 Sat busy working at his documents,  
 His head upon one side, with slanting eyes  
 Upon the lines formed by his running quill.  
 He quit his task, half turning in his seat,  
 Viewing us sharply; smiled then half in scorn  
 At such extreme dejection, "Ah," he said,  
 "Prisoners, I see! Go, orderly, report  
 Two prisoners to the general, and return."  
 And turning to his documents again  
 Wrote on. And the proud soldier at the door  
 Obeyed, his saber clanking as he went.

Then passed a scene I never shall forget—  
The strangest play considering time and place  
My eyes had ever seen. . . . There entered now

Into the tent and circle through the door  
Two men, pre-eminent by port and garb  
O'er all the sorts encountered on our way,  
Whose very air and attitude dispensed  
The ether of authority.—The one,  
Troubled of eye and careworn, moving slow;  
The other young, prince-like, with flashing  
eyes,

From whom flowed forth a heat impetuous  
That signified a warrior sound of heart—  
A fine dark fellow!

When within the lodge  
They stood ere long, the elder from his place  
Looked round about him, listlessly it seemed,  
And scornfully reluctant toward the task  
He saw full grown before him; till his eyes  
Within their narrow circuit of survey  
Found out the cowering dame.—Then all  
was changed!

A soldier's lot finds out a man surprised  
Full often; but surprises such as this  
Seldom indeed:

“Why Madam!” he exclaimed,  
And “General,” she replied, distinct and  
short.

And furious from that greeting there arose  
A storm of tongue and temper unapproached  
In all my memory of wordy wars—

The crown and flower of female railery,  
 Saved by just wrath from mere vulgarity  
 Detestable to see. It was a sight,  
 And not without its laughter, to behold  
 That high commander, memorable of name,  
 The court-be-dizened darling of the wars,  
 Who never bowed before an enemy,  
 Whipped in his tent by one wronged woman's  
                   tongue,

And she his kinswoman from over seas,  
 Bound with his cause in soul and sentiment,  
 A royalist outspoken from the heart!  
 A doting lion hungering for prey  
 Had pounced upon and caught a lioness!  
 And now, Sir Lion, look you out for claws!  
 Ay, and the claws were there; and suddenly  
 Unsheathed, made havoc seven times more  
                   complete

Than sudden swords of alien and adversaries  
 Whom courage might o'ercome.

“Sir,

stand and look!

This is a precious piece of gallantry,  
 Right worthy of a royal officer  
 And gentleman!”

’Twas thus the gale began,  
 And gathered power and tumult as it blew,  
 Drowning all apposition.

“By my word,”

“Upon the honor of a gentleman;” . . . ,

“Madam, I swear!” . . . “Permit me  
                   but a word;” . . .

"I never knew—indeed how could I  
know;" . . .

"I beg you stop and let me say a word;" . . .  
Twigs in the wind! 'Twas wonderful to note  
What gusts of words, what flashes scintillant  
Of keen sarcastic lightning; shattering bursts  
Of most authentic thunder; what sharp  
thrusts

Of darting irony dealt thick and fast,  
One following on another like a glance,  
Poured from the fiery heart and stormy lungs  
Of that great titaness! . . .

And ended all  
In one great cry that filled the tent and shrill-  
ed,  
Piercing all ears—

"Oh there stand  
murderers here!  
Ask them of Jenny—ask of Maid McCrea!"  
And then the true warm woman in her heart  
O'ercame at last her rage, and she sank down  
Silent, and like a woman all in tears.  
And then the tongue-stunned chief, remem-  
bering

His breeding and his magnanimity,  
Brought forth a cloak of folds voluminous  
And gallantly as ever soldier could  
Laid it about the shoulders of the dame,  
Beseeching her to wear it for a time  
Till, in his thought, a fitting robe be found  
To better clothe her form. And she arose

Muttering short thanks, and shaking down  
the folds

Sat down again, her soul immersed in thought.  
And then the clerk, whose pen had quit its  
task

Upon the outbreak of that wordy war,  
His eyes meanwhile brimful of sparkling fun  
And overbubbling humor scarce restrained,  
Resumed his quill and scratched on as before.

The general, mild and all obsequious,  
Complacent with his tact and management,  
Stood rubbing hands vivaciously. Behind,  
Unmoved—impervious, ranged along the  
wall,

The Indians stood like shadows darkly  
limned,—

But shadows with live eyeballs, now and then  
Slanting their dusky glimmer, half at rest;—  
Patient, on foot taking their wonted ease.

And every mind took on a sense of calm,  
And every heart conceived a welcome touch  
Of human fellowship; and every face  
Softened to looks of comfort and content  
At this subsidence;—every face save one,  
And that was white and anxious, as the man  
Moved ceaselessly about the tent's curt space,  
Restless of eye. A panther might have  
moved

Thus while the brush stirred with the hunters'  
steps

Closing the hunt around him. As he paced

His glances played in an incessant search  
Betwixt the dame and those dumb witnesses  
Ranged 'gainst the wall with looks inscrutable.  
Was this the soldier whom my eyes had mark-  
ed

Just now with admiration—princely then  
With all a graceful carelessness—but now  
With soul strained like a bowstring while it  
                trembles

Tense for the shaft? A little this went on;—  
Then burst the prisoned soul forth into speech  
And action, shattering the shallow crust  
Of calm o'erlying that profoundest pit  
Of heart-convulsion. For, with eyes on fire,  
Great in the splendor of his agony,  
He strode to meet this last of enemies—  
The knowledge hid to master him and throw  
His life adrift upon the waste of years.  
Swift was the stride that brought him to the  
dame,

Fierce almost was the passion of the hand  
He laid upon her shoulder. And he stood  
Above her muffled shape with burning eyes,  
And in her ear with note imperious  
Heard by all ears beside.

“Tell me of her;  
Speak quickly, I command you—What of  
her!”

And then the answer came, but not from lips  
Of any speaking creature. While he spoke  
Three wild and warlike figures foul with dust



And soil of darker stain, came gliding in  
 And pausing rolled their restless eyeballs  
                   round;

Silent, constrained in that high company,  
 Yet fierce with gleams of triumph breaking  
                   through.

And as the soldier turned and faced them  
                   there,

One, a wild creature, brawny like a wolf,  
 Raised a strange thing he had, held it aloft,  
 And with a foul forefinger significantly  
 Tapped it and smiled—a grim inhuman  
                   smile—

Even for a savage strange and hideous.  
 Then from behind there rose a fearful cry,  
 A woman's cry of anger and despair;  
 As when a lioness, returned from hunt  
 All day for prey to feed her little ones  
 Hungry within their covert, comes at night  
 And scents the bodies of her little ones  
 Slaughtered by hunters; and in rage and  
                   grief

Peals through the wastes her desolated cry,  
 So cried the dame and rose, her mighty frame  
 Aquiver, and her eyes aflame, her hand  
 Pointing—"O, see!—That is our darling's—  
                   that—

O they have slain—have slain our innocent:—  
 O were there but a man here to avenge  
 That deed! And then by burning instinct  
                   spurred

She moved upon the savage;—needless now,

64      THE LOVER'S TRAGEDY

Because there stood a man and lover there,  
David, beloved by the gentle girl  
So loved—then martyred now immortalized!  
“That thing my darling’s—that—” he stood  
and said

In mournful echo of the words the dame  
Had cried from out her stormy agony.  
And thus he stood and gazed bewildered  
there—

Bewildered for a moment, but no more!  
For then there fell and sure and sudden  
stroke

That rolled the savage gasping to the floor,  
Where like a whirlwind passed a furious  
strife

Between those fiery warriors white and red;  
One bent on vengeance deadly in its aim,  
And one, with wily art and ready tact  
Evading that one end. From side to side  
They over and over rolled, until the tent  
Shook, and the bearskins flew this way and  
that

Among the circling spectators, disturbed  
With panic, this way dodging and then that,  
To shun the writhing bodies. Thus the strife  
Went on; and when 'twas finished there arose  
A soldier breathless, haggard, wild and torn,  
And in his white right hand that fearful  
gage—

That fearful, beauteous gage of strife locked  
fast—

The maiden's crown of glory, her bright hair!

And then he staggered panting through the  
     lodge,  
 And found a seat and sat, his face bowed  
     down  
 And sunken in his hands in utter woe.  
 And there he staid awhile; then stirred and  
     passed  
 A hand across his brow, and o'er his face,  
 And groaned aloud in searching agony.  
 Like an unresting spirit for a time  
 He sat and stirred:—then suddenly arose  
 And groped toward the tent-door, till an arm  
 Was lent in pity, and he leaned on that,  
 And passed from sight, a broken ruined man.

Once when that night I left my prison tent  
 And stood within the moon's light, with the  
     stars  
 Above that secret deadly wilderness  
 Flashing their kindly beacons from above;  
 And the wind sighing mournful 'mid the tents,  
 And a far creature crying in the depths—  
 Upon the outmost edge of clustered tents  
 Where the dark earth fell off to blacker  
     shades  
 Of dense morass with cedar crownéd glooms,  
 I saw within the sad flood of the moon  
 A night-companioned wanderer pass my place,  
 Who when he saw me standing slipped aside  
 And sought the shelter of a distant tent.

And thus forever wandering without rest,

66 THE LOVER'S TRAGEDY

From land to land, from place to place he  
goes,  
Companioned by his soul's deep memories;  
And for his eyes' sight, with him evermore—  
Inseparably present where he is,—  
Memorial glorious of his earthly love,  
The maiden's crown of glory, her bright hair.

And like as I beheld him on that night  
Shall he pass restless, lonely through the  
world,  
Till death's still tent receives him from the  
night.



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